

17

THE
DIFFICULTIES
AND
DISCOURAGEMENTS

That attend the
Dissenting Ministry,
With the most PROPER METHODS to
Remove THEM;
IMPARTIALLY CONSIDER'D,
IN A
SERMON
Preach'd to a CONGREGATION of
PROTESTANT DISSENTERS.

*Quæramus, quid Optime factum sit, non quid Usitatissimum, &
quid nos in Possessione Felicitatis æternæ constituat, non quid vul-
go, Veritatis Pessimo Interpreti Probatum sit. Sen. de Vit Beat.
Invitus Ea tanquam Vulnera attingo, sed nisi tacta tracta-
taq; sanari non Possunt. Liv.*

L O N D O N:

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*The Reader is desired to correct the following
Mistakes, which happen'd by Reason of the
Author's distance from the Press.*

PAGE 11. line 4. for observe, read reflect. p. 11 l. 17. for Functio, r. Function. p. 16. l. 7. for Religeon, r. Religion. p. 34 l. 32. after Authority. r. that. p. 37. l. 12. r. unintelligible. p. 43 l. 23. after Notions. r. as to lesser Matters. p. 46. l. 26. r. Superstitiously. p. 52. l. 6. after Practices. r. that. p. 42. last line r. form



THE PREFACE.



I would be needless to suggest here, what Inducements made Way for the Publication of the following SERMON.---- It now appears from the Press, as it was deliver'd from the Pulpit, few Enlargements excepted.

THAT the Difficulties and Discouragements complain'd of, often prove injurious to the Dissenting Interest, is a Truth (I am sorry that it is) too evident to be deny'd or disputed: But still even our Enemies must acknowledge that these Difficulties can't in the least derogate from the Excellency and Solidity of that Foundation, which this Interest is establish'd upon.

THAT there is nothing in Non-Conformity, when the Principles of it are rightly understood, either mean, or ridiculous, Nothing but what a Gentleman may embrace without any Diminution to his Honour, and may publickly vindicate without being asham'd,

will appear from the Reflections in the following Discourse.

WE are fallible as well as our Neighbours, and consequently liable to Mistakes, both in Practice and Judgment; but if we live up to the Principles of the Reformation, (and those are the Principles of our own Faith,) our Virtue will shine, and our Profession flourish.

I am appriz'd that some will disapprove and Others censure the Freedom and Unreservedness us'd in canvassing this Subject. In Trade and in the various Branches of Literature 'tis an agreeable Character to discover a generous Concern in detecting Errors, and reforming Abuses: And why shou'd it not be the same in Religion? However, as the Author is not Ambitious of Signalizing himself any otherwise than as a Lover of Truth, and professeth himself engag'd in no other Interest than that of common Christianity, he hopes none who consider him under those views will condemn his Sincerity and Frankness.

I shall only add, If these Thoughts prove any Way serviceable to the Cause of Liberty and Truth; If they meet with a candid Reception from the Patrons of that glorious Cause; Next to this, there is Nothing the Author shall regard as greater Fame, than the Anathema's and Displeasure of Bigots.



JEREMIAH XX. 9.

-----And I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.



THESE you'll observe are the Words of the Prophet *Jeremiah*. -----As I am now departing from You, I have chosen to deliver my Farewell Thoughts to you from this Portion of Scripture, as being applicable to the present Occasion.

THAT I may more naturally introduce what I am to discourse upon, give me leave to offer a few general Remarks, on the Conduct and Circumstances of the Prophet, before I enter immediately on my Text.

FIRST, Observe what Freedom *Jeremy* us'd in exposing the reigning Sins and Superstitions of the *Jews*. He could not but foresee, that this would bring an Odium upon him; yet he is neither ashamed, nor afraid of declaring the Truth. The Messages he deliver'd were not cloath'd in the soft

Lan-

Language of Courts, nor his Address like that of *Parasites*, who flatter themselves into Preferments: He had no Interest to serve, but that of Virtue; no Ends to promote, but those of Religion; and Nothing to expect from what he did, but the Reproach of Men, and the Approbation of Heaven.

UNDER these Circumstances he is obstinately Virtuous;---dares be in the Right, (I mean the right Way to obtain a good Conscience, not to secure Dignities and Honours,) notwithstanding the implacable Fury, and violent Opposition that his being so threatned him with. He did not (like some modern Temporizers,) prostitute his Office and Integrity, to the Caprice of those who were about him: He was better instructed, than to give Way to such an ill-bred Complaisance, if I may be allow'd the Expression.

As to those who assume an Air of Bigottry, when in Conversation with Bigots; who are Enthusiasts in the Family of Enthusiasts, but change their Politicks, and put on a moderate Dress when they appear among People of Sense, let Charity be their Judge and Accuser: That they prefer such low Arts to low Life, is the best Apology they can make for their Conduct; and if the best be so wretched, instead of vindicating Themselves, they would better sit down undisturb'd, under that Infamy which feeds and cloaths them; and to want of Integrity, add want of Shame.

BUT

BUT still it will be said, Prudential Views and Considerations should restrain us from opposing those Vices or Errors, which Men of Figure and Character, are attach'd to.----That is, play the Hypocrite, lest you want Bread: Better be an Impostor, than a Beggar. But how came not the Prophet to judge so of the Affair? Should not he have sooth'd the *Jews*, to secure their Favour and Esteem? So far is he from it, that he charges them with the most infamous Crimes:---- The Sins of their Tongues;---- Their Priests bear Rule over them, and which is much more surprizing,---- They lov'd to have it so.----They exercis'd greater Severities in Religion than G O D enjoyn'd, or approv'd of.----He calls upon their Women, instead of dealing out Deceit and Scandal, to come and hear the Words of his Mouth; and teach their Daughters wailing, instead of teaching them, what they were too much addicted to of themselves,----Pride, Haughtiness and Oppression.

WHEN the Prophet had been thus dangerously sincere in his Ministry to the *Jews*, no wonder if he awakened their Rage, and rais'd up Storms of Persecution against himself: They had a high Veneration for their religious Fooleries; They were under the Influence of a superstitious Zeal: That Man must be sacrificed, who had Sense enough to see thro' their Delusions, or Integrity enough
to

to oppose them. The very same Spirit prevails among some profess'd Christians: Thus many behave in *Great-Britain*, as well as within the Territories of *Judea*; and our Conduct and theirs, are much nearer a-kin than our Climates.

BUT tho' Prejudices in Favour of Superstition and Folly, are not easily rooted out of Men's Minds, this should by no Means tempt Ministers to betray their Trust: The longer such a Spirit is indulg'd, the more Reverence it usurps, the more Reverence it usurps, the more obstinate it grows, the more obstinate it grows, the more difficult 'twill be to remove it: For *Zion's* sake then Ministers should not hold their Peace, for *Jerusalem's* sake they should not keep silence, till Virtue and Christianity shine in all their original Glory and Brightness.

SECONDLY, We may take Notice of the first Rise of the Prophet's Persecutions, and Sufferings. The first that disturbs him is one nearly allied to the Priesthood, and chief Governour in the House of the LORD: It might have been expected, *Pashur* had been better taught, than to persecute the Prophets; but thus it has been, and thus it is.----Those who ought to be the strictest Defenders of our Liberties, are often the very first that betray them.----But I wave so ungrateful a Subject, and shall only observe, That were *Jeremy* now to rise from the Dead, and behold the Conduct of some
un-

uncharitable Zealots among Christians, I know not whether he might not mistake them for the Inhabitants of *Judea*, and cry out again, *I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.*

THIRDLY, We may observe, that *Jeremy* was not peculiar in his Complaints of the Jews, but that all the Prophets join'd, in bearing Testimony against them.

IT would be both tedious and unnecessary, for me to exemplify, how all the Seers and Prophets testify'd against *Israel*: How happy would it be, did the same Spirit prevail among Christians! Did Ministers of all Denominations agree to discourage Bigottry, Enthusiasm and Superstition, where-ever they appear; how soon would our Wilderneses, which contain Nothing better than Thorns, Briers, and Serpents, become as an *Eden*; and our Deserts, which are uninhabited, as *the Garden of the LORD*?

THESE Particulars I have premised, as I hope they'll sufficiently justify that Freedom and Impartiality I shall use in, Prosecution of my Subject.

THE Words I am to expatiate upon, may be consider'd, either

As the Prophet *was weary of forbearing* with the Follies of the Jews, and therefore would expose them with that Severity they deserv'd. Or else,

B

T H A T

THAT the Success of his Ministrations was so inconsiderable, that he *was weary with* continuing among them.

I SHALL consider the Words in the latter of these Views, tho' I shall be naturally led to take some Notice of the Former. And here with an Eye to the present state of Christianity, and more particularly that of Protestant-Dissenting Societies, I shall

I. ENQUIRE into some of the more common Causes, that weary out Ministers, and make their Lives uneasy, and uncomfortable to them; and shew that Complaints on this Head, are not idle and groundless.-----And as I propose to continue no longer among you, tho' I depart, I shall, out of a rational Regard for your Welfare,

II. LEAVE with you some Thoughts, on the most proper Expedients, to remove those Difficulties complain'd of, which I hope may be of Use, if you improve them.

I. I AM to enquire into some of the more common Causes, that weary out Ministers, and make their Lives uneasy, and uncomfortable to them; and shew that Complaints on this Head, are not idle and groundless. And

FIRST,

FIRST, May I not mention, want of Success in their Ministrations? How melancholly to behold the Unfruitfulness of Christians! How affecting to observe, on the long Series of Blessings we have enjoy'd, and call to mind, how poorly we have improv'd them! Must it not afford a very ungrateful Reflection to Ministers, to look back on the Time, and the Labour they have spent in Vain, without Comfort, and without Usefulness in their Stations? Those, whose Function calls upon them, to communicate Knowledge and Instruction, must be sensibly aggriev'd to observe, that notwithstanding their best Endeavours for that Purpose, few of their Fellow-Creatures are wiser, or better. What a prevailing Indifferency among Christians, about Affairs of the greatest Moment! 'Tis not the downfall of Enthusiasm, or Superstition that I bewail; but the Decay of Veracity, Justice, Charity, Benevolence and Goodness. Considering how great our Mercies, one would judge, did not Experience testify the Reverse, that it would be a Wonder in Nature, to meet Sinners in *Great-Britain*: We live in a *Land that floweth with Milk and Honey*; but Alas! we turn its Fertility into a Curse, and it floweth with Iniquity too: We have the Advantage of a *Gospel-Revelation*; but such are the Mis-improvements made of it, that I would sooner choose to die under the Character of a moral Heathen, than under the Circumstances

stances of many nominal Christians:- We live in a Protestant Country, have free access to our *Bibles*; we of this Age enjoy greater Blessings, than our Fathers that went before us, in the same Nation; they waded thro' Floods of Blood, and march'd thro' Fire and Faggot towards the heavenly Kingdom; they storm'd and took it by violence, but Grace lies prostrate at our Feet, seeking and sueing our Acceptance. When our Fore-fathers were harass'd with Imprisonments and Prosecutions, the Word of the LORD gave a sweet savour to unsalutary Dungeons; but now Iniquity is interwoven (as it were,) into the very Constitution of the Air, that we breath; we are become so politely Wicked, that few mention the Name of the DEITY,----- unless it be in dreadful Imprecations.

SHALL I proceed any farther?---- Even among those who profess a great Veneration for Christianity, who attend religious Institutions, are there not many, whose careless Behaviour betray the Negligence and Inattention of their Souls? Are there not Others who behave, not as if they were to pay divine Honours, but as if they were to receive them? Not as those who worship, but as if they came to be ador'd? Shall I be oblig'd also to take Notice, that there are some others, who, if they receive any Benefit in the House of GOD, it must be in the same Manner with the Prophets of
Old,

Old, by conversing with Him in Dreams and Visions?

BUT I forbear descending further into Particulars,----nor would I expose these Practices from any other View, than as they tend to expose our Profession.

MUST it not be very afflicting to Ministers, that there is such a Spirit of Lukewarmness, spread over the Face of the Nation? That they are attended with so little Success in their Ministrations? Tho' an Angel from Heaven was to preach, yet under such Circumstances he would become soon *weary with forbearing*. But

SECONDLY, Another discouraging Circumstance to Ministers, is to see Religion painted in gloomy unnatural Colours. There are great Allowances to be made, for Men's natural Dispositions; some Constitutions are inclin'd to be very much on the Reserve, and are in a high Degree strangers to social Blessings: But when this is the Case, mistake not Nature for Grace; ascribe not that to Eminency of Virtue, which is better accounted for from the Temperament of your Bodies.

SOMETIMES those who have no natural thirst after the agreeable Relishes of Life, are apt to imagine, it discovers a Principle of Piety to despise them; but if it be so, 'tis what is conferr'd on many with their Existence, and what they derive from their Mothers Womb. If any are under the Influences of a dark Imagination, let them not arraign

atraign the Divine Goodness, to exalt themselves: Let them not represent Christianity, as demanding any unreasonable Exactions, or suggest that the Religion of JESUS, is cast in the same Mould, with their own Melancholy Spirits: *His Yoke is easy, his Burden is light*; very light indeed, in comparison of that, lay'd upon us by some mistaken Enthusiasts. It is a most dangerous Notion, to look upon a Holy Life, as full of Anxiety and Horror: May I be allow'd to mention the Name, of that truly primitive Christian Mr. Baxter, without giving Offence? He speaks thus of the Matter, *Abhor all Suggestions, that would make Religion seem a tedious irksome Life, and take heed that you represent it not so to Others; for you'll never make them in Love with that, which you make them not perceive to be delectable, and lovely.* Men err when ever they run to Extremes: As some have made the specious Pretext of Good-nature, a Cloak for Debauchery and Lewdness; so on the other Hand, Persons are *righteous overmuch*, when they pretend to discover Traces of Heresy in an easy Address, or when they regard it as an unpardonable Iniquity, to be innocently facetious. Has the Supreme BEING given us rational Powers, only to tantalize ourselves with? For what End has the ALMIGHTY given us Capacities of relishing the innocent Gratifications of Life, if he has under Pains of Damnation forbid us to enjoy

joy them? For what Purpose has H E who made Nothing in vain, given us Sensations of Pleasure, if we must always bow down our Heads like a Bulrush and be cloath'd in Sackcloth and Ashes? Dare any weakly (I will not say wickedly,) suggest, that the great Disposer of all our Affairs is a malevolent Being, and as ill-natur'd as themselves? What unworthy Apprehensions must they entertain of H I M, who is absolutely perfect, that judge him pleas'd with extravagant Peculiarities, affected Oddities, or insignificant Forms? It can never be that a God infinitely Wise,----should exact Absurdities; infinitely Good,----should put a Yoak upon us, we are not able to bear: This were to place J E H O V A H on a Level with ourselves;----To suppose that he adopts our greatest Imperfections;----To say that he, whose Goodness shines throughout all his Works envys the Happiness of his Creatures. What then doth the L O R D require of thee, O my Soul? Does he require that thou should'st disfigure thy Complexion? That thou should'st torture the Features Nature gave thee? That thou should'st have an austere, or a despairing disconsolate Aspect? That thou should'st not touch, nor taste, nor handle, in order to recommend thy self to his Favour? No; he requires thou should'st *do justly, love Mercy, and walk humbly with thy God.*

NOTHING hath been of more fatal Consequence to Religion, than painting it in gloomy Views: This has led many to Despondency, fed them with shocking Fears; it has brought Multitudes down untimely to their Graves, and led many more into open Prophaness. But did Religion consist only in a dejected Melancholy Conduct, the dark Regions of Despair would be the most religious Part of the Creation.

BESIDES, may I not observe that such Parents, who have brought up their Children under unreasonable Restraints, denying them the innocent Amusements of Youth; such Parents I say, have most an End betray'd that Virtue they would establish. 'Tis but natural to suppose, that they who rob Religion of it's Charms, rob it of many Admirers: When it appears in a mournful Dress, it is more like a Ghost than the fair Daughter of the Skies; some shudder at the very Name,---Others deny it's Existence. Thus youthful Persons brought up under the Influence of severe Principles, and and a misguided Education, when arriv'd at Years of Maturity, and become their own Masters, have deem'd Christianity but Craft, Piety but Superstition; have torn off their Chains and become eminently Wicked: Tho' the Years of my Pilgrimage have been but few, I have met with many Instances, to confirm the Truth of this Observation.

IT must then be very discouraging to all such as entertain just Notions of their Duty, (to Ministers in particular,) to see it thus dangerously mis-represented: 'Tis not our being always upon our Knees, or our constant reading our Bibles, (tho' these are Duties too generally neglected,) but our carrying religious Dispositions always about us, that will secure us the Approbation of the *Great Searcher of Hearts*. A Man may indulge himself in all the true substantial Pleasures of Life, without offending his MAKER: 'Tis Excess, or setting an over-value upon them, to the neglect of nobler Pursuits, and more elevated Enjoyments, that the Supreme BEING has forbidden; and what will a censorious World judge of us, if whilst we make a greater Profession than Others, we excell them in nothing but the moroseness and sourness of our Conversation?

FAR be it from me, to encourage any Thing that borders on effeminate Levity, or that favours of Immorality and Profaneness! What I would recommend is, an habitual Cheerfulness, and an inoffensive Freedom of Behaviour throughout the Whole of our Lives. Who has a nobler Foundation for Rejoicing, who has a better Hope, more exalted Promises, or a more glorious Prospect in Reversion, than the true Christian? The Conscience of having done well, that there is an Omnipotent Hand always ready to supply our Necessities, assist our Weaknesses, and guide our Steps, must needs render a Spirit

of serenity triumphant in our Bosoms; to be chearful under such Circumstances, is as natural as 'tis to breath.

BUT notwithstanding this, the Life of Christianity is often represented dark and uncomfortable as the Grave: It would be uncharitable to insinuate that those who do so, have any wilful Design to wound Religion thro' their Sides; but this I am assur'd of, that the pernicious Effects of the Notions they inculcate, are greater than the Integrity of their Intentions can atone for.

THIRDLY, Another very discouraging Circumstance to Ministers is, to see a greater stress laid upon being of such a Party, than upon a holy unblameable Life: That this has been often the Case, is not at all to be doubted; it would be a great Pleasure for me to be convinc'd, that in this Respect I am mistaken: But alas! doth not the Conduct of those who esteem themselves sound in the Faith, plainly shew (as has been observ'd,) that they imagine Orthodoxy will cover a Multitude of Transgressions? Have there not been those, for at present as Light and Liberty prevail, I hope there is no Shelter for such bare-fac'd Ignorance and Presumption; have there not been those I say, who numbring themselves among GOD's Elect, have judg'd this sufficient, and liv'd as if there were no GOD? ---Let me indulge no Partiality in my Reflections.---Are there not Others whose commendable Regards for Moderation, have degenerated into an Indifferency about Religion, and
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plead this as Matter of Praise and Merit? Once more; Are not the greatest Zealots for a Party, often the most censorious and uncharitable, and yet the most Ignorant too? Are not these the Men, that stamp Heresy and Damnation upon all who differ from themselves?

THUS the *Pharisees* made an Ostentatious shew of Religion; they thought themselves the Excellent ones of the Earth, whereas in reality they had no other Title to Preheminence, but what they deriv'd from Superstition; nor no claim to superiority, but what was founded in Hypocrisy and Darkness: They were as religiously observant of paying Tythes, as the Priesthood has generally been to exact them; very great Zealots for their Establishment, but very bad Men notwithstanding all this.

EVERY Man has a natural Right to worship God, according to the Dictates of his own Reason; yet no Party-Cause is worth the espousing, any farther than it has a Tendency to cherish Virtue, and promote Holiness in our Lives. What will it avail to be of such a Church, or Communion, if at the same Time we are not sincere Christians? Wherein am I better for assembling with such Societies on Earth, if I am never likely to join the glorious Assembly of the First-born above?

AND here I cannot but take Notice, how apt Men are by the Influences of a bad Example, and a worse Education, to cultivate

in themselves the most savage Dispositions, Human Nature when free from any corrupt Byass, is prone to acts of Virtue, Beneficence and Meekness; but then it is too generally distorted out of it's original Frame. Man becomes fierce, untractable and cruel, like the Beasts that perish; nay, often intellectual Savages are the more accomplish'd of the two: Even from their Childhood Multitudes are nurs'd up in Party-Wranglings, as if they had been baptiz'd in the Waters of Strife; and to render the whole more intolerable, Nature is ungratefully arraign'd, and dis-ingenuously condemn'd, as giving Birth to such unlovely Productions. But,

As we have Capacities susceptible of any Impressions; how useful may they prove to Mankind, and how ornamental to ourselves, if they are list'd betimes in the Service of Religion, and brought under a due Regulation in our tender Years? When Men's Minds have taken a wrong bent in their Youth, it has render'd them throughout the whole Course of their Lives, so many Plagues in the *Almighty's* Creation: Hence it is that Persons remarkable for Nothing, but their great Zeal, and little Knowledge, have often made a tumultuous Uproar, with the Cry of Heresy and Schism; but what is there in all this, to promote Virtue and Goodness? It will promote Pride, Malice, Ignorance and Enthusiasm, and Nothing else, at least Nothing better.

WHEN the Bigot pours out his Wrath, and his Folly, against those who don't see
with

with his Eyes: I would ask, *Dost thou well to be angry?* Are not those whose Principles differ from mine, my Fellow-Creatures? Do they not worship the same God; and believe in the same Revelation of his Will? Do they not expect the same Judgment to come? Are they not Heirs to the same Promises; and in Expectation of the same future Rewards? Dismal Infatuation! that Men should murder one another in Honour of that Religion, which forbids all Animosities! That the vilest Barbarities should be perpetrated, under the venerable Name of Zeal for the Gospel of JESUS!

IN the Judgment of the great Day, there will be no Questions ask'd that we find, what Principles we espous'd; what Notions we entertain'd, about Things which all contending Parties own to be in some Degree incomprehensible, and yet each strives to unravel: But what Lives we led; what Improvements we made of our Blessings?

SOME there are, (and with Pleasure I speak it, there are but few such in the present Generation,) whose Charity not only begins at Home, but there it terminates, and seldom goes any farther: That there are any Remains of such a Spirit as this, must, or at least ought, nearly to affect those engag'd in the ministerial Function.

I WOULD not persuade any to be wavering in their Faith; it would be wicked to attempt it, and 'tis needless; Men are too prone to this of themselves. *Let us hold fast our Profession;* but let us not turn loose our furious
irregular

irregular Passions, to condemn all whose Understandings are not of the same Size and Complexion with ours: It is an amiable Sight, to see Piety flourishing amidst any Community of Christians.

FOURTHLY, Another very discouraging Circumstance to Ministers is, to find intestine Divisions among the Societies they belong to: Such Divisions among those who profess Christianity, will extirpate the Life and Power of it more effectually, than the most violent and outrageous Persecution. How melancholy is it to observe, that Christians, those of the same Communion, embark'd in the same Interest, should never be unanimous but ----in doing Evil, and agree in nothing but----promoting their own Ruin! To see worse bickerings and quarrels, or at least more strangeness between Members of the same Societies, than there are betwixt *Turks* and *Infidels*, or even among *Wolves* and *Tygers*!

WHEREVER Christians are thus divided among themselves, 'tis easy to foresee without a Spirit of Prophecy, that the Ministry has Nothing to do there: Where such Dissentions are carry'd on (*the Devil knows how*, (as *Dr. Tillotson* expresses it,) we may say with *Jehu* of Old, *What Peace, so long as the Whoredoms of thy Mother Jezebel, and her Witchcrafts are so many?* Where such a Spirit reigns, Peace must dye, and Piety cry out, *LORD save me, or I perish.*

IF Men indulge in themselves perverse splenetick Dispositions, they'll soon grow habitual

bitual to them, and by Degrees they'll look upon them as sacred, and mistake Ill-nature for Zeal. When Passion triumphs over Reason, it will raise Storms, that will be as outrageous as the proud Waves of the Sea; but Storms that will not be as obsequious to our Commands, as they are to the Voice of their Maker, when he says to them,---*Hitherto shall ye go, but no farther.*

THAT there should be some Persons of uneasy turbulent Spirits, in most religious Assemblies, is not very surprizing; but how to demean towards such, without giving Offence, is best known by an Occasion to make the uncomfortable Trial: Sometimes a meek and humble Carriage may conquer Prejudice, and soften Bigotry with its Charms;---if this succeeds not, what remains, but neither to court their Favour, nor dread their Frowns: Let them alone till their own Wickedness corrects them; with the wild Bull in the Net, they'll be tir'd with their own Fury, 'tis well if they work not their own Ruin.

FIFTHLY, Ministers must be discourag'd, to see any attempting to lord it over their Faith. We are your Servants for CHRIST's sake, but don't make our Understandings your Slaves: It is unbecoming that Men of the lowest Attainments, should teach their Teachers what they are to believe, and be more Sollicitous to nurse up their Ministers in their own Faith, than to nurse their Children in their own Cradles: Indeed whilst a Man takes care of his Off-spring, and instructs his little Ones
to

to lisp out their pretty Impertinencies, none can blame or disapprove of his Conduct; but I see no Right any have to impose upon Others, what Articles of Faith they should believe; there is no more reason to desire it, than that they should choose Co-partners for their Lives; yet such there have been, as claimed a Liberty of imposing their Sentiments on Others, and judg'd those Reprobates that could not comply; that is, they hated them and would have GOD do so too: But as for my Part, let Others do as seemeth best in their Sight, I would own no Lord over my Faith, but the *Supreme Law-giver*, to whom I am accountable for it.

'TIS surprising, that those, whose Profession is founded on the Principles of Liberty and the Reformation, should be greedy of putting on their own Fetters; should mourn after Slavery, and court their Chains. To be *Papists* in a *Protestant Profession*, is the most intolerable Thing in the World; nay if *We* are such, many will conclude, that we dissent not from the establish'd Communion because we are against Impositions, but because we would monopolize all Power of imposing to our selves: If we make any Invasions on that Liberty our Principles so sacredly maintain, the least Mistake will be observed, and magnified in our Conduct, and Spots are soonest discover'd in a Body that glitters.

HOWEVER this has been a frequent, and no unjust Cause of Discouragement, to many faithful Servants of CHRIST: St. *Paul* was not

not in Deaths and Dangers so oft among the Jews, as the Doctrine of examining all Things, which he inculcates, has been among some mistaken Zealots; nor was *John* (the Disciple whom *JESUS* loved,) so far banish'd from his own Country, as the Doctrine of Charity he recommends, is from the Hearts of some profess'd Christians.

SIXTHLY, Another discouraging Circumstance to Ministers (which I would willingly pass by in silence, only that I should do Injustice to my Subject, if I decline mentioning it,) is,---The little Regard that is shewn for the Support, and Continuance of a Gospel-Ministry among us. That there should be some Men set apart to recommend Virtue and Goodness, appears every Way a wise and rational Institution: The Bulk of Mankind are so far immers'd in Sense, that they would differ but little from the undisciplin'd Herds of the Forest, had they no other Knowledge but what they spun out of their own Minds, by the help of a long Train of Reasoning and abstracted Speculation; supposing them equal to Improvements of this kind, yet for want of proper Helps, Opportunities and Application, they can make but a very slow Progress, in deducing the Obligations of Religion, from the Light which Nature furnishes them with: Under this View the Sceptick must believe, and even the Infidel acknowledge, that the Design of the Ministry is great and Noble. To instruct the Ignorant, and reform the Immoral, is a God-like
D employ;

employ; but then the Task is not less difficult, than glorious; and should there not be suitable Encouragements, for Persons to devote themselves to the important Work? Heavens forbid I should be an Advocate for Ecclesiastical Usurpations, or Judge that any have a divine Right to fleece and plunder those whom they are sent to feed; but still let it be consider'd,---that those train'd up for the Ministry, have sometimes the best Part of their Patrimony expended on a liberal Education; at least, what is expended that Way if laid out upon Trade, would probably have made their Fortunes grow and flourish, and render'd them useful Members of Society, in some honourable Occupations of Life; and should not Gratitude lead you to pay some suitable Regards, to those whose Dispositions thus incline them to sacrifice their own private Interest, to the Service of Virtue and Religion? The least you can do, tho' the most they demand, or perhaps expect, is,---To make Provision for their commodious Scituation, and comfortable Subsistence among you. Let none suggest, that this implies a Distrust of Providence; no, we would recommend our selves to the Care of that BEING, who provides even for *Ravens*: But as our nobler Nature forbids us to live upon Prey, as they do; so I would hope, none will require that we should rob them of their Habitations, and dwell in Deserts, or Forests. Is it not enough that Ministers should want Success in a religious View, but must they want Bread too? If they have the Name of *Angels* appro-

appropriated to them, they have not their Nature, and are as little capable to live without Food, as without tailings. Must the Wages of the Gospel, like *the Wages of Sin*, be *Death*? Superstition may lead Men to great Lengths, yet few can be so unthinking, as to imagine, that 'tis commendable to fast out of Poverty, as well as out of Principle, or that it discovers a pious Disposition to starve for Conscience Sake. We claim no Right to lord it over your Faith, or Fortunes, but insist on this, that an easy competency of the Blessings of Life is necessary for us; it will promote our Usefulness, give greater Weight and Authority to our Instructions, render our Influence more extensive, and support the Dignity of our Stations. 'Tis absurd to expect God should work Miracles for our daily support, or that he should interpose in an extraordinary Manner in our Behalf, and *rain down Bread from Heaven upon us*.

It is with Reluctancy that I further observe, what our Enemies behold with Pleasure, that many are become injudiciously nice, and impertinently curious, in their Choice of Ministers: A blind-zealous Attachment to *Creeds* and *Systems* is too often look'd upon, as an authentick Testimony, both of Piety and Merit, whilst the greatest Integrity of Manners, join'd with a large stock of useful and solid Knowledge, is but little admir'd, and much less encouraged. In several Societies there are those who take great Pains to think for their Pastors, but never are at the Trouble

ble to think for themselves; and would measure the Understandings of Others, by the scanty Dimensions of their own Brains. How many bright Ornaments of our Profession has this perverse Humour, either wholly banish'd from among us, or at least prevented from engaging in the ministerial Function? If this be not a just Cause of Complaint I know not what is.

THUS I have pointed out the chief Discouragements, that oppress *Ministers* of the *Dissenting Denominations*;--- I don't insist on these Discouragements, as being altogether peculiar to us; but as I apprehend, if we act in Consistency with the Catholick Principles we espouse, our Complaints will be no more, and all our Difficulties vanish: Bigotry, Enthusiasm and Superstition, are intellectual Weeds that will grow in any Soil: How happy would it be, as I observ'd before, if those whose Province it is to reform and civilize the Manners of Mankind, would take care to extirpate these Weeds wherever they are met with; or cultivate them into a noble, generous and rational Zeal.

How far I have engag'd in this Attempt, and how far I have succeeded, most present are able to determine: You bear me witness, that I have frequently press'd a due Improvement of Religious Blessings; I have shewn you, that GOD has dispenc'd his Favours towards us, with a bounteous Hand; that *he has not dealt so with every Nation,* and that---*What do ye more than Others?*---

is an important Enquiry we are nearly concern'd to answer.

I HAVE also born my Testimony, against all disadvantageous Representations of Religion; have shewn that Men's Zeal is not to be determin'd, as their Beauty, by their Features, and Faces; that Honour and Piety, are no incompatible Ideas; that Virtue is amiable and lovely, as well as awful and majestick.

NOR have I neglected to set before you, how dangerous it is to lay too great a stress on the Peculiarities of a Party, and to express a more zealous Regard for some abstruse metaphysical Notions, which good Men have always differ'd about, than for Judgment, Justice and Righteousness, with the weightier Matters of the Law, which on all Hands are allow'd, to be Duties of an important Nature.

NEITHER have I declin'd in my stated Ministrations, to shew the Consequence of intestine Divisions, how subversive they are of true Christianity, and how directly contrary to the Messages of the Prince of Peace.

BESIDES this I have always stood up in Defence of your religious Rights, against all bold and arbitrary Encroachments; taught you never to discover a blind Veneration for the Names of Persons that are as fallible, and may be more weak, and less honest than your selves: I have endeavour'd to satisfy you, that you are to call no Man *Rabbi*, take up with no set of Principles meerly because such a One did espouse them; but search the Scriptures;
search

search them without dreading the Name of *Hereticks*, and try whether the Doctrines they teach be of GOD; If upon the best Enquiry it appears they are not, whatever Sanction they may have, or Authority to recommend them; tho' they be the Doctrines of *Luther*, of *Calvin*, of your own Pastors, or even of an Angel from Heaven, make no scruple to reject them: You are to answer for your own Souls, and therefore have a Right of believing for your selves.

INDEED, I have always been very tender in touching upon the Encouragement due to the Ministry: Enlarging upon this during my continuance among you, might have made Way for uncharitable Censure, and Misrepresentations; but now I am departing from you, I hope I may urge it, without giving either Covetousness, Envy, or Malice, Room to suspect my having any sinister Views.

I HOPE the Impressions of these Truths, to which I have been alluding, will remain on the Minds of some present, when I have left you. I pray GOD bid him good speed, who is to succeed me; in establishing more successfully, and universally the same important Truths; in rescuing the Grace of GOD from any Violence offer'd it, by injurious Representations; and in vindicating Religion from any cruel Aspersions cast upon it, in the House of its gloomy Friends: May Bigotry grow impotent under his Ministrations, and Enthusiasm for ever rage in vain!

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To succeed in an Affair of this Nature, Prudence and Zeal must go Hand in Hand; some necessary Condescensions, and a generous Regard for Truth, must kiss each Other.—Having then, with a View to the State of Christianity in General, and that of Protestant-Dissenting Societies in particular, set before you the Discouragements that attend the Ministry; I cannot devote the Remainder of the Time that is allow'd me, to better Purpose than

II. IN offering some Thoughts on the most proper Expedients, to remove the Difficulties complain'd of. And

FIRST, Let every One rest easy, and contented in his own Station: A due Regard to this, would be for the Welfare of Society in general, as well as highly advantageous to religious Assemblies: To concern our selves in Affairs, which we are neither call'd to, nor qualify'd for, is (using the softest Expressions) to commit a Rape upon Nature. A busy intermeddling Disposition, nurs'd and cherish'd by a misguided Zeal, is always very disagreeable, often proves very dangerous and too frequently fatal and destructive; such a Temper is so far from being a Branch of Religion, that it subverts the Foundation of it, and puts our holy Profession, as the Jews did the Author of it, to open Shame; hence it is that *St. Paul* recommends it to Persons, whom out of tenderness I forbear to mention, That they would govern in their Families, guide in the House, but not rule in the Churches.

SECONDLY.

SECONDLY, To remove the Discouragements that attend the Ministry, and restore Religion to a flourishing State and Condition, have a special Regard to the Instruction of your Families; and acquainting both yourselves, and them, with a Reason of the Hope that is in you. If you take your Religion upon Trust, 'tis not unlikely, that Motives of the same Importance, that is, of none at all, will prevail with you to quit it. If you can give no better Account why you are of such a Perswasion, than that your Fathers were so before you; 'tis very likely you'll bury your Religion in the same Grave with your Fathers, and never see the Face of either any more, unless it be in the Day of Judgment to condemn you.

THERE is such a Thing as Zeal without Knowledge; this may make a great Noise and Bustle in the World, but what will it do more? However strong our Passions may be, yet if Storms of Persecution should arise, they will not invigorate, but weaken---and abate them: If we would be steadfast in our Profession, *that neither Life, nor Death, nor Principalities, nor Powers, nor Things present, nor Things to come,* may shock our Faith, Religion must be the Matter of our Choice, and deeply founded in our Judgments. It will be much more difficult to stifle the powerful Convictions of Reason, than to lull our Passions into Slumber.

THE same Advice I would give, with regard to the Education of your Children. Convince them with the easiest Arguments, that there

there is a GOD: Give them a Survey of their own bodily Frame and all the Works of Nature about them; this will lead them to believe in that GOD, who gave them an Existence: Represent him, as a Being full of Clemency and Goodness, that is doing good continually towards all his Creatures: Shew them what peculiar Advantages they enjoy, above Others, in the scale of created Beings; how much happier they are than the Beasts of the Field, or Fowls of the Air, or inanimate Parts of the Creation.

THIS will naturally inspire them with Principles of Gratitude, towards the Author of their Blessings.---Here you have a proper Opportunity, to acquaint them with the Nature and Importance, of Prayer, and to impress upon their Minds, an awful Sense of Religion; but let it be from the most engaging Motives, and winning Considerations; Severity may disturb their tender Spirits.----Perplex their young Understandings with dark, or disputable Points, as little as possible: Represent Virtue in the most amiable Views, that its Charms may constrain them to love it: Give them to understand, that Religion sits gracefully on a blooming Countenance; improves, and adds fresh Beauty to all the Charms of Youth.

THE Minds of young Persons (as an ingenious Author observes) are not gain'd by difficult and refin'd Reasonings; they must be enticed by agreeable and familiar Images; to make Truth lovely to them,
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it must be exhibited by sensible and beautiful Representations. Take heed that you instil into their Minds, Nothing but pure unsophisticated Truths: Where the Seeds of Benevolence and Virtue are sown betimes, they will be deeply rooted, and soon grow up to make a flourishing Appearance in the Conduct of humane Life: This will be doing Justice and Credit to the Grace of God, which bringeth Salvation.

FURTHER, teach them why they should be Christians, rather than Heathens, or Jews: Shew them that the Gospel is a Dispensation, calculated to promote our present Happiness, and future Welfare: Acquaint them with the History of JESUS of Nazareth, and an Account of his miraculous Actions; let them Understand that they could not be the Works of the Devil, because the Doctrines they were to recommend, and give Sanction to, were Subversive of Satan's Kingdom.

THUS when you have establish'd them in the Belief of Christianity, by Arguments suited to their Capacities, and Years; you may proceed to acquaint them with your own particular Profession: Give a better Account of your Faith, than that you chose it out of Aversion to a few Modes of Worship: Shew them, that Things indifferent in their own Nature, should not be enjoyn'd as necessary, by Humane Authority; all Impositions, are what Virtue, Generosity, and a sacred Magnanimity, should engage us to bear

bear Testimony against;-----that to bow down submissively to Humane Decrees and Impositions, without being convinc'd of the Reasonableness of them, at best deserves no milder a Censure than offering the Incense of Fools, and indeed betrays if not more Ignorance, yet even more Baseness and Pusillanimity of Spirit than sacrificing to Idols. ---that none have a Power over our Consciences, besides the *Supreme Lawgiver*; ---that we have as inviolable a Right to choose our own Faith, as to choose our own Food; and---that requiring us to sacrifice our Integrity, for maintaining the Peace of Establishments, is in Effect attempting to make Proselytes to Vice; and representing the Church, as the worst Enemy to Religion, that ever had a Being. Thus *train up your Children, in the Way they should go, and when they are Old, 'tis not likely they should depart from it.*

NOR look upon this as a trifling Affair; unless the present Age takes due Care about the Education of Youth what will become of the rising Generation? Surely the World must become like an Habitation of Owls, both for it's Deformity, and Darkness.

THIRDLY, If you would remove the Discouragements complain'd of, let a Spirit of Love and Benevolence reign among you, and dwell in your Hearts. The more solemn the Profession a Man makes, he doth but the more publicly expose it, unless adorn'd

by a suitable Conduct: How disagreeable must it then be, to see Christians waging War, against the Duties of Love and Charity, which the Gospel so earnestly inculcates, and frequently recommends? Shall it be said of the Disciples of JESUS, that they carry Nothing venerable about them, but the Name that they wear? Very often it is so---the Thing is but too palpable to be conceal'd, ---and yet too too lamentable to be acknowledg'd! How little is the meek Spirit of Christianity regarded? But I need not enlarge here,----our Enemies will tell the Rest.

LET Men amuse themselves with ever so many Notions of their Effectual Calling, or some secret Operations of the SPIRIT, the Tree is to be known by the Fruit that it bears: Hereby we are assur'd that we are CHRIST'S Disciples, if we love One Another. Dissentions are more intolerable still, when they are pretended to be for Religion; for Christians to butcher one another, out of Zeal for that Gospel which forbids all Hatred, Persecutions and Envyings, is not to be religious; 'tis to rave out of Principle, and grow mad in the Name of the LORD.

GIVE me leave then to exhort you, to live in Peace, on religious and civil Accounts, with one another, if you expect, *the God of Love and Peace to be with you*: Take heed lest by Animosities, Strifes, Backbiting, Slandering, or double Dealing towards one another, you should become the Executioners

tioners of Heaven's Displeasure, against your own Souls.

FOURTHLY, To remove the Difficulties complain'd of, entertain such Notions of Religion, as are worthy of the Divine Perfections. Most Men take their Notions upon Trust, instead of forming them by the sacred Standard of Truth; their first Recourse for religious Instruction, is not to the Bible, but to Creeds and Systems; they look upon these to be as infalible, as they are generally unintelligible, and then (Cruel Martyrdom!) torture Scriptures to speak their Meaning, if they have any at all.

THUS it is, that Doctrines have been father'd upon Christianity, which are not of its own Propagation, and the simplicity of the Gospel eclips'd. How often have Things plain in their own Nature been explicated into Mysteries, and illustrated into Abiurdity and Contradiction? Where would the Hurt be to Religion, to our Neighbour or to Ourselves, if we were to rest satisfy'd with the express Declaration of Holy Writ without imposing upon Others our own private Interpretations? Must honest and sincere Christians be charg'd with rejecting the Scripture, unless They are willing to make Scripture an abandon'd Prostitute to Creeds and Systems? Must a Man be deem'd an Infidel if he believes his Bible, rather than the Decisions of proud unthinking Bigots?

M O S T

MOST of the Objections of Deists center in this, that they mistake the Traditions of Men, for the Doctrines of GOD; they charge those Chimera's upon the ALMIGHTY, that have no Existence, but in the Brains of Persons, who perhaps of all Others, are the most Superficial, ---next to themselves: The Difficulties charg'd on the Christian Faith, on this Footing, have their Weight; but properly speaking, these Objections don't affect true Christianity: Let Superstition and Folly have all that Contempt pour'd down upon them, that they most righteously deserve; but let no Occasion be taken from hence, to attack the most Sublime and important Truths.

HENCE we may judge of what Consequence it is to the Success of the Ministry, that just and worthy Notions be entertain'd, both of Religion, and the *Supreme Author* of it: It will by a sweet and engaging Violence, captivate all the Powers of Reason to the Obedience of Faith.

I can't see how we can reconcile it to the moral Perfections of the Deity; that any Truths essential to Salvation should be involv'd in Perplexity and Darkness. A good God who commission'd a Person to publish his will to Mankind, can't be suppos'd to leave them at uncertainties in Affairs of Eternal Moment: It by no Means answers the Design or Character of a Revelation, that Things of the most absolute Importance shou'd be clogg'd with the great-
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est Difficulties. To leave Matters in obscurity, where Men may easily Err, and where the Error must prove fatal, doth by no means comport with our Notions of a Wise Benevolent Being. The Almighty can take no Pleasure in puzzling his Creatures, or bewilddring their weak Understandings: the Truth is, whatever the Bigoted, the Interested, or the Designing, may advance to the Contrary; the Fundamentals of Christianity are few and Obvious. That there is a God, that JESUS is the MESSIAH promis'd; that Salvation is to be attain'd in the way He has appointed, are Truths adapted to the Capacities of All but such as stubbornly resist Conviction. The Man who believes these Things and discovers the Sincerity of his Belief by a suitable Conduct, stands as fair for Happiness as those who rack their Brains with School Sophistry, and Ecclesiastical Jargon.

LEARN then what the **LORD** requires of us; he enjoyns us, to obey his Laws:—The Injunction is not unreasonable, nor will our Compliance be found grievous. God doth not call upon us to make him a Sacrifice of our Comforts, but to render our Happiness as extensive, as the present State of Humane Nature will bear.

RECOMMEND Religion then in the most Engaging Views; shew that it doth not encroach upon any of the innocent Pleasures of Life, that it does not forbid inoffensive Gayeties, seasonable or useful Diversions. Do Justice to your Profession as Christians;
instruct

instruct the Sons of Prejudice, or Ignorance, that it has a Tendency, not to destroy Virtue, but to polish away all ruggedness of Temper; to check all irregular Sallies of Passion; to render those under its Influence; mild, compassionate, beneficent, and easy of Access, and that it exalts humane Nature many Degrees beyond it Self. Always take this as an establish'd Rule in your Religious Enquiries; Whatever Doctrines Men propagate, which have an ill Aspect on our Morals, which are destructive of Benevolence and Goodness, or which lay a Foundation for Pride and Uncharitableness, can't come from GOD, or be a Part of that Revelation he has deliver'd to us: Such Notions, tho' deem'd ever so solemn and important, should be rejected with Disdain, and Horror. Nothing can derive its Origin from Heaven, but what tends to train us up for that Kingdom, and will at last bring us safely thither. Sadness (as an ingenious Writer observes,) *may spring from Guilt, or Superstition, and Rage from Bigotry; but Darkness might as well be suppos'd the natural Effect of Sunshine, as sullen and furious Passions, to proceed from the glad Tidings, and divine Precepts of the Gospel.*

BE tender of the DIVINE HONOUR; never represent the great FATHER of our Mercies, as a furious implacable Being, let even Blasphemy dread appropriating such a Character to him, as would be deemed wicked and reproachful in our selves. Let the thought that any Being should destroy what it gave Birth

Birth to, lodge only among the savage Inhabitants of the Desarts, or in the Breast where inhumanity reigns and Triumphs; but let it never be said, that the GREATEST, the WISEST, and the BEST of BEINGS, sports himself with the Destruction of his Creatures. The Veneration we owe, the REDEEMER of Mankind, is very great; but yet 'tis a common Mistake, for Persons that would exalt and aggrandize the Love of our SAVIOUR, to derogate from the Love of the FATHER. The SUPREME BEING has been look'd upon as Inexorable, till CHRIST dy'd for us: He whose Goodness shines throughout all his Works, has been ungratefully represented, as very severe in his Measures, if not arbitrary and cruel; whereas we ought always to remember, that it was his kind unsolicited Regards for us, that engag'd him to send his SON, to be a Propitiation for Sinners.

LEARN to distinguish between Faith in the REDEEMER, and a foolish dangerous Presumption, However meanly you judge of your own Righteousness, take heed that you do not renounce, and forsake it in your Lives: *Faith without Works is dead*; I hope the mistaken Notions, some have conceiv'd about these Matters are dying too, apace in the World,—May they never see a Resurrection!

LEARN also to form a just Judgment about the efficacy of Religious Institutions: They are not design'd as so many Charms, to translate us to a happy Futurity; but as Means to prepare us for it: They are valuable only

as they tend to promote Piety in our Lives; to confirm, and establish us in Virtue.-----I would mention one Thing more under this Head.

LEARN how to address the Almighty in Prayer: Indulge no private Resentments against your Fellow-Christians in that Solemn Duty; let Nothing favour of Wrath, or a party-spirit, in your Petitions to him, whose love is as unconfin'd, as his Nature. Approach him with the most awful Regards, and a suitable Decency of Expression; pray with the Spirit, but pray with the Understanding also: And above all take heed, you blend no controversial Affairs with your Prayers; thus Brethren that differ as to lesser Matters, may yet worship GOD sincerely together.

THESE are some of the most needful Particulars, I thought proper to mention; with Regard to our Entertaining just Notions of Religion. A due Observance of these Things, would facilitate the Work of the Ministry, and with the divine Blessing, render it abundantly successful.

FIFTHLY, Another Expedient I would offer, is, That your Zeal be always proportion'd, to the Importance of the Matters it refers to. Let your Regards for the Honour and Success of pure Christianity always sit uppermost in your Affections. For this End study to be attemper'd to the spirit of the Gospel. Consider that the great Design of the Christian Dispensation is to cultivate our Manners, reform our Lives, and render us worthy Members of

of Society. As to what you expend for the support of Religion, 'tis the way to make yourselves Friends of the Mammon of Unrighteousness, by transferring your Treasures from Earth to Heaven. A little Frugality, a Retrenchment of superfluous Expences at your Tables, Visits, or Diversions; will capacitate you to be more extensively useful in your Stations, than otherwise you can be, without injuring yourselves or immediate Dependents. And

As to the Encouragement you owe your Ministers; having in the former part of my Discourse suggested some Thoughts on that Head, I need not enlarge here;---I trust it wou'd be an Affront to your Judgments, as well as the generous Principles of Liberty that determine our Profession to descant any further upon it.

WHEN you have settled your Zeal for Christianity in general,---when it hath its proper Influences on your Conduct; proceed to regulate your Notions. Fix not a greater Stress upon Affairs of a speculative Nature which you do not understand, than upon Virtue and a good Life. Let not Ceremonies be preposterously prefer'd to those Duties whose Obligations are Eternal, Peace, Justice, Charity and Love. Often there is more Zeal shewn for a favourite Phrase, or Principle, which if rejected would make us never the worse men, than there is against the most enormous Vices, which threaten us with impending Ruin: Where this unhappy Spirit tyrannizes, a profligate

fligate Person that believes Canonically, meets with fairer Quarter, and kinder Reception, than an honest, tho' it may be mistaken Christian, that much better deserves it. An unfociable, Censorious, uncharitable Disposition, will be conniv'd at, if not meet with Approbation; but if a Man falls into an involuntary Error, Bigots will murder his Reputation, and as if that were not Punishment enough, his Soul shall be consign'd to the Devil.

Is this the Genius of the GOSPEL? Are these the meek Disciples of JESUS? Can a Man observe such a Conduct, without different Emotions of Spirit? Would it not excite both Pity and Laughter, to see Persons of no Education, better pleas'd in displaying their Parts, and impertinence, about controversial Speculations, than in doing Justice, or supplying the wants of the Needy? What Detriment has the Ministry receiv'd from the Hands or rather from the Tongues, of such unreasonable Men? How has the vulgar Cry of Heterodoxy, and Heresy, seiz'd Multitudes with a Panick Dread, that know no more what these Expressions imply, than *Balaam's* Ass did of the Madness of the Prophet?

It would argue more Modesty and Discretion, to be less positive about Things not clearly reveal'd, and to divert our Zeal into a nobler Channel: Chastity of Thought, as well as Chastity of Behaviour, has something in it very elegant and engaging.

W H E N

W H E N ever then any One that owns J E S U S to be the promis'd MESSIAH, differs with you about the Sence, or Explication of Particular Scriptures; say not, such a One is a Heretick; Denies the LORD that bought him; but say rather, Salvation depends not on this, he thinks me in the wrong, tho' I believe he is mistaken; tho' we differ in the Way, let us hope and pray to meet again at the End of our Journey; Heaven will open our Eyes and make us all agree.

U P O N this Foundation, the Christian Faith will become establish'd, that the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it; Creeds, Councils and Confessions, shall not banish Virtue out of the World; Nor shall we ever deserve the Opprobrious Reflection, that we wear the Name of Religion, as we do our Garments, that the Shame of our Nakedness may not appear.

S I X T H L Y, It can never be unseasonable Advice, and I hope it will not be ungrateful to any,---Guard against those Immoralities, which are most chargeable upon our Profession. 'Tis true, our Faults and our Features, are too nearly ally'd to us, to be competent Judges of them, and if either appears to Disadvantage, 'tis Natural we should be prejudic'd in its Favour; But still, let us give an equitable Hearing, to the Worst that can be said of us: If we are misrepresented, the Reproach recoils upon our Accusers; but if we can't always deny the Facts we are charg'd with, (and who is without Fault?) let us
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for the Future, avoid giving Occasion to the Ignorant and Malicious, who seek such Occasions to asperse us. You may judge of the Particulars I allude to; some of them are common to a Proverb.---*They won't swear, but they'll lye and dissemble.*---*They won't curse, but they'll back-bite and slander.*---*They won't cheat, but they'll out-wit you.*---*They won't smile in Conversation, but they'll rejoice in Iniquity; or if they smile, 'tis with a Design to cut your Throats.*---These are severe, often they are unjust, would I could say they are always unrighteous Accusations.

As we would adorn and recommend our Profession, let us take heed that we don't, like the Jewish Hypocrites of old, *strain at a Gnat, and swallow a Camel*; Let the Wisdom of the *Serpent*, and Innocency of the *Dove* go together. There may be Purity without Preciseness, Fervor without a Frenzy, Godliness without a fullen Gloom spread over our Faces, and Zeal without Ostentation: Appear courteous and affable, sincere in your Pretensions, just in your Dealings, free without Levity, and open without Dissimulation: Let it not be said, that you superstitiously avoid Superstition, and therefore affect no Peculiarities, but such as a good Conscience requires: If you must be singular; be eminently Virtuous.

NEITHER imagine that the Practice of some Virtues, will atone for the want of Others. Have you *Rahab's* Faith? ---Let it not be joyn'd with her want of Integrity too: If we would not blaspheme Heaven, neither should

should we defame any of our Fellow-Christians: If we would not rob a Neighbour of his Life and Fortune, neither should we endeavour to ruin his Reputation: If we would not be drunk with Wine, let us not be drunk with the Product of the same Country,-----a proud, perverse, persecuting Spirit. If we would not be thought to bear the Image of *Satan*, let us not be going too and fro in the Earth, seeking whose good Name we may devour. Thus it is, that we should take all proper Methods, to guard against such Charges, as are most frequently exhibited against us: 'Tis such a Conduct alone, that can be serviceable to the Interest of Christianity, and consequently to all its sincere Friends; if it should not gain us Profelites, it will gain us an honourable Esteem; if it should not bring others to our Way of Thinking, it will abate and lessen their Prejudices against us, and hasten those happy Days which as yet have not been seen, when the *Lamb* and the *Lion* shall dwell in Peace together.

LASTLY, Take heed that the Spirit of GOD be not provok'd, to depart from you. Is it not enough that Discouragements should attend the *Ministry*, but must GOD's Patience, Long-suffering and Forbearance, be wearied out too? Let us take a View, both of our Blessings, and our Misimprovements of them; As to Temporals, we live in the Fatness of the Land; none of us know what it is to be visited with the Plague, Sword, or Famine; our Mercies flow down upon us,
much

much faster than our Gratitude ascends towards Heaven. But this is not all; not only our Civil, but religious Blessings are secured to us: We live under a free Government, and want Nothing to make us the happiest People under the Sun, but grateful Resentments of our Mercies: *We sit under our own Vines and our own Fig-trees*, and what have we but our Sins to complain of, or to make us afraid? Our Privileges are now, what the Distresses of our Fathers have been in former Ages,----*Greater than we are well able to bear*: So long have they shone in their Meridian Glory, and with such a powerful Lustre, that we are almost struck blind with the delightful inviting Prospect: We dwell in a Land of Liberty, and are left free to every Thing, but to work out our own Ruin. Would you require me to Number the Mercies we have abused? Ask me to count the Hairs of your Head, the Stars in the Firmament, or the Sands on the Sea-shore: I can as easily do it. The LORD'S Loving-Kindnesses can't be excell'd, and are to be equal'd only by our Provocations: What then must our Ingratitude deserve? But---hitherto the LORD has spared us.

THOSE Churches which were once the most flourishing in the World, are now bury'd in their own Ruins: But what brought these Judgments upon them? --- Their Pride, their Contentiousness, their false Zeal, and their false Hopes. The Sins of our Days, of our Assemblies, that most are guilty of in some Degree,

Degree, if not in an aggravated Measure: Have we partaken in their Offences? Take heed, and reform betimes; lest we also feel the like Consequences to attend them.

PROVOKE not the *Divine Presence* away. ---Some will regard this, as a Chimerical Notion, that dwells only on the Tongues of *Priests*, or the Brains of *Enthusiasts*.---I'll allow that a warm Imagination, tainted with gloomy Notions of Religion, will swallow down the grossest Contradictions, and readily digest the most solemn Absurdities, as so many sacred Truths; but on the other Hand, I hope none will deny me this reasonable Concession, ---That if important Doctrines, are sometimes misunderstood by the Weak, or perverted by the Artful and Designing, this will not justify Others, in rejecting them as ridiculous, or useless. When I speak then of the *Divine Presence*, to guide and conduct us; let none conceit, that they are under the Influences of a supernatural Impulse, or that they are favour'd with any extraordinary incomprehensible Communications, from the *Holy Spirit*. How far the *Supreme BEING* exerted his Power, in a miraculous Manner, upon the first planting of *Christianity*; or how far he may do the like, on any other emergent Occasion, is not at Present the Question: But in the ordinary Course of Affairs, such Interpositions, are what those who read *Moses* and the *Prophets*, have little Reason to hope for, and much less to promise themselves: What we are concern'd about, and what I am now recommending is this,---
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Truth GOD is with us. To urge this more closely, I would set before you the following Particulars, with which I shall conclude.

THE Presence of the *Holy Spirit* is forfeitable, it will not always strive with Man; hitherto, we have heard the gracious Overtures of the Gospel, what if the next Voice should be, *They are joined to Idols, let them alone*,--- their own Iniquities will reward them?

'Tis not only forfeitable, but 'tis in a great Measure lost already: The Mantle, or the Profession of *Elijah*, will be of little Avail, where the Presence of the GOD of *Elijah* is wanting. What is become of that holy generous Love, that in Primitive Days cemented Christians together, that the Gates of Hell could not divide them? *Our Fathers; where are they?* Where we shall never be, if we forsake the GOD of our Fathers; even in the Kingdom of Bliss, *singing Praises to him that sitteth on the Throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever*: Where too are their Graces? True, they had their Peculiarities, but they were Amiable in their Weaknesses, I had almost said Praise-worthy in their Imperfections. When Religion dies, where, are they that now say--- Let us die with it?

ONCE more, the Presence and Influences, of this *good Spirit*, is not only forfeitable, but lost in a Measure; not only lost in a Measure, but, is there not too visible a Declension in that Portion of it, that is remaining? *When the Son of Man comes, shall he find Faith in the Earth?* May we not in many Instances,
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see Religion every Day, panting, gasping, struggling, just breathing its Last, and yet--- loath to forsake us? Allow the Expressions; for certainly there is Life in Religion, tho' it be now dying apace among Christians.

As therefore we have the Interest of Christianity, and the success of its Ministers at Heart, let these Considerations be duely weigh'd: Endeavour to preserve, or recover, the gracious Presence of GOD's Spirit among you. When Ministers depart from the Societies, that have been under their Charge, some may not be affected with it, it may create Uneasiness in others: But wo to us all, *if GOD depart from us!* This must pierce the Heart, like a poison'd Dagger, that will kill by it's Influences, if not by a sudden Stroke. As *Moses* petition'd *Hobab the Medianite*,---*Leave us not to our selves, forasmuch as thou knowest we are to encamp in the Wilderiness, and thou must be to us as Eyes;* so let us address our heavenly FATHER,----*Forasmuch as thou knowest, that the Things which remain are ready to die,* leave us not to our selves, but may thy Grace uphold us.

THUS have I consider'd the Difficulties and Discouragements, that attend the *Dissenting-Ministry*, with a becoming Impartiality and Freedom: I have also propos'd some Expedients, towards removing these Difficulties. Some will be apt to suggest, that it had discover'd more Prudence, to have treated this Subject with more Tenderness and Caution; but surely no Wise man would be afraid to
look

look on his Mistakes, with an unprejudic'd Eye, and no good Man would covet to persevere obstinately in them. It is the Glory of humane Nature, and it will be a peculiar Ornament to any Profession, to retract whatever Notions, or renounce whatever Practices, are not capable of being rationally defended: Would all Communities, exercise this honest Severity against themselves, what happy Influences would it have in the Church of GOD!--But I forbear enlarging.

AND now, to put an End to this long Discourse; tho' I am to leave you, yet GOD forbid that I should Sin against the LORD, in ceasing to pray for you: My earnest desire is, and shall be, that you may be saved, and may we all meet at the last in that blessed Kingdom, where we shall everlastingly dwell together! Now I commend you to GOD, and to the Word of his Grace; remember what you have receiv'd, and heard, and hold fast, and repent; and may the GOD of Peace, that brought again from the Dead our LORD JESUS, that great Shepherd of the Sheep, thro' the Blood of the everlasting Covenant, make you perfect in every good Work, to do his Will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his Sight, thro' JESUS CHRIST; to whom be Glory for ever and ever. Amen.

F I N I S.